

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 1, 2011

The Honorable John McCain
United States Senate
241 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-0001

Dear Senator McCain:

We are writing to express our opposition to your amendment to the FAA Reauthorization bill repealing the Essential Air Service (EAS) program. As it is currently drafted, we will not support your amendment, and will be calling upon other Senators representing communities that benefit from the EAS program to oppose it as well.

As you know, the Essential Air Service was established after the 1978 deregulation of the airline industry and has grown into a vital, non-controversial, program that connects Americans living in rural communities with the rest of the world. According to May 2010 data, there are 109 airports in the contiguous 48 states, Hawaii and Puerto Rico, as well as 44 in Alaska, receiving subsidized service.

Eliminating the program will have a devastating impact on the economies of rural communities. At a moment when the nation's economic recovery is starting to gain momentum, it makes little sense to reduce personal and business travel volume by cutting off residents of rural areas. And at a time when jobs are already so hard to come by in our rural communities, it makes even less sense to enact cuts that will only make the problem worse.

Over the years, Congress and the Department of Transportation have worked to streamline the EAS program to increase its efficiency, mostly by eliminating subsidy support for communities that are within a reasonable driving distance of a major hub airport. The FAA Reauthorization bill currently being debated by the Senate proposes a number of additional improvements, such as allowing new financial incentives for EAS carriers to encourage better service; allowing longer-term EAS contracts if such an arrangement is in the public interest; allowing

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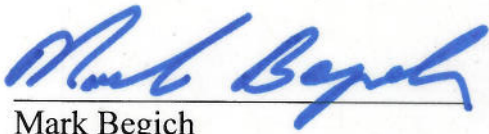
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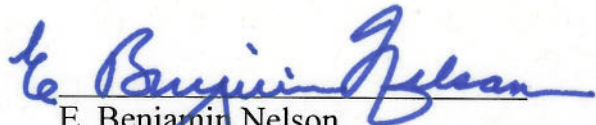
incentives for large airlines to code-share on service to small communities; and requiring large airlines to code-share on EAS flights in up to ten communities.

Because we strongly believe in this program and understand the fiscal challenges facing our nation, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss ways to improve EAS. But we strongly oppose ending it. We ask that you abandon your attempts to repeal EAS and work with us to ensure its continued success across the nation.

Sincerely,



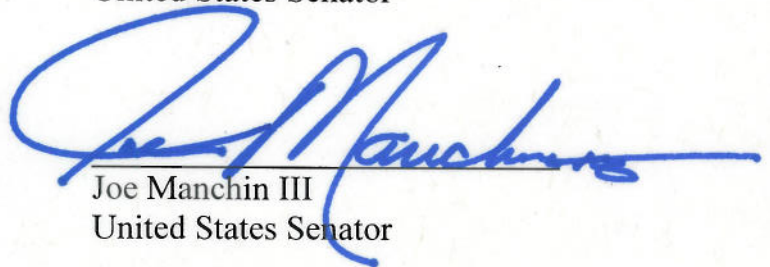
Mark Begich
United States Senator



E. Benjamin Nelson
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey Jr.
United States Senator



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable John Rockefeller
The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison